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ABSTRACT

Wyoming is the least populous of the 50 states--less than half a million people share a territory of 95,000 square miles, which translates to about one person for every five square miles. Given this geographic reality, the challenges that all national service programs face in recruiting volunteers, building community involvement, and sustaining programs are greatly amplified in Wyoming. But Wyoming appears to have turned its challenges into assets. Local volunteer organizations have learned how to turn inward in their communities, to share resources, to rely on each other for support, and to collaborate on special projects. This case study of Wyoming's national service programs focuses on their making connections with local literacy resources. The case study is divided into the following sections: Introduction; Collaboration between State-Level National Service Offices in Wyoming; National Service Programs in Wyoming (Project PAL in Laramie; Teton Literacy Project in Jackson Hole; America Reads on the Wind River Reservation; America Reads in Natrona County); Non-National Service Programs in Wyoming; and Conclusion (recommendations are offered). (NKA)

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Wyoming: A Case Study

National Service Programs Making Connections with Local Literacy Resources

CS 014 252

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Wyoming: A Case Study

National Service Programs Making Connections with Local Literacy Resources

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Corporation for National Service

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Introduction

Wyoming, the least populous of the 50 states, lies where the Great Plains meet the Rocky Mountains. With its dry, grassy plains in the east and towering mountains in the west, the state has an average elevation of 6,700 feet, higher than any other state except Colorado. Less than half a million people share a territory of 95,000 square miles, which translates to about one person for every five square miles. The largest city has a population of around 50,000; the smallest town, a few people living at a crossroads with a post office.

Given this geographic reality, the challenges that all national service programs face in recruiting volunteers, building community involvement, and sustaining programs are greatly amplified in Wyoming. Towns with a small population base from which to draw potential volunteers may have a high need for the social services that can be provided by volunteer and nonprofit organizations. Lengthy travel times, limited access to transportation, mountain ranges as high as 13,800 feet, and long, hard winters present daunting obstacles to collaboration between programs and between communities.

However, Wyoming appears to have turned those challenges into assets. Local volunteer organizations have learned how to turn inward in their communities, to share resources, to rely on each other for support, and to collaborate on special projects. "It's an extension of the ranching mentality," says Cathy Lyman, Executive Director of the Wyoming Commission on National and Community Service. "You may not even like your neighbor, but if he's in need, you're going to help, because who else is there? People pull together to get the work done."

Although Wyoming has a relatively large number of statewide organizations that support literacy, including the Wyoming Reading Council and the Wyoming Center for Lifelong Learning, the backbone of the state's literacy activities remains within its small communities, where a web of communication and collaboration has developed around volunteer projects, regardless of the focus of service. National service programs such as AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), and Foster Grandparents must share the limited monetary, material, and volunteer resources in their communities with other nonprofit and volunteer organizations.

Currently, no network or connecting mechanism exists *across* the state for education-focused projects, national service or otherwise. While new technologies such as listservs and video conferencing offer the most effective ways to connect programs around the state, cost and access to equipment remain serious obstacles for most local programs. Limited time and resources keep the focus narrow and close to home. Connections with organizations and projects outside the community usually only happen at special events such as the statewide conference on volunteerism.

Collaboration Between State-Level National Service Offices in Wyoming

Administrators of the three statewide national service programs—the state Commission on National and Community Service (Serve Wyoming), the Corporation for National Service, and the state Department of Education—serve as a clearinghouse of information for their respective programs, and provide links to trainers and peers by keeping staff apprised of upcoming events, opportunities to collaborate, and other relevant happenings.

The annual Nuts, Bolts, and Dreams conference, coordinated by Serve Wyoming, is a central event for publicizing and celebrating both national service and volunteerism. Held in a different Wyoming town each year, this conference brings together all national service staff and personnel from nonprofit and other volunteer organizations, and state and local government agencies. Participants spend two days attending sessions, networking, learning about local programs, sharing strategies, planning collaborative projects, and celebrating the year's achievements. Attendance at the conference has increased each year since it began three years ago.

After the conference, however, continued communication between regions and programs is not consistent although state administrators and, in particular, national service staff wish to continue the networking initiated at the conference. As a first step, personnel from Serve Wyoming, the Corporation for National Service State Office, and Learn and Serve have designed a shared database of area trainers. The database has the capacity to generate a training calendar and list of events that any national service program staff may attend.

This recent state-level collaboration occurred as a new director of Serve Wyoming was hired, and both Serve Wyoming and the Corporation State Office were planning to hire training coordinators. The opportunity for innovation was at hand, and the need for sharing information and connecting programs was clear. In an initial planning meeting facilitated by LEARNS, staff from the three offices discussed their common training and technical assistance needs, developed a single needs assessment for training requests, and agreed on the usefulness of a common database of local and area trainers and experts. Perhaps most significantly, they shared ideas about how the program development and training (PDAT) coordinator and Corporation State Office

The word Wyoming comes from a Delaware Indian word meaning *upon the great plain.*

training coordinator (a VISTA member who will assess training requests) could work together. Since that meeting in January 1999, the PDAT coordinator has come on board and assumed the task of finalizing the needs assessment. Further collaboration on training events will occur when the VISTA training coordinator is hired in the fall.

Challenges

Staffing is the most significant challenge currently facing the national service offices at the state level. Serve Wyoming is staffed by an executive director and the half-time PDAT coordinator. The Corporation State Office is staffed by the director alone, and the Learn and Serve supervisor has many other roles and responsibilities, accreditation of schools chief among them. Every day, these three program directors must juggle the demands of assisting field staff, planning new projects, and meeting reporting and other administrative requirements, in addition to single-handedly maintaining an office.

With such limited staffing, collaboration at both the state and local program levels proves difficult, though not impossible. For programs in close proximity, and whose work is complementary or overlapping, the Corporation State Office encourages "natural" collaborations that can foster partnerships between programs. For example, the director of the Corporation State Office has been instrumental in linking the program director of a new Foster Grandparent Program with an AmeriCorps*State project coordinator. Both coordinate America Reads projects based in Laramie, Wyoming. This partnership has proved successful for several reasons. The partners run similar projects in the same location, sharing both program content and geographic area served. Both project directors view their programs as integral to meeting larger community needs, so they are naturally motivated to work together—and with others—to serve the community.

Perhaps most significantly, the partnership has worked because reciprocity of benefits is at the core of the relationship. For example, the veteran coordinator of the AmeriCorps program introduced the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) director to the local education and literacy community, and helped the new program gather resources, connect with the schools, and recruit and train volunteers. In turn, the FGP director has become an active member of the literacy community, creating a training subcommittee in a local literacy organization so that all programs can share information and plan joint events.

Successes

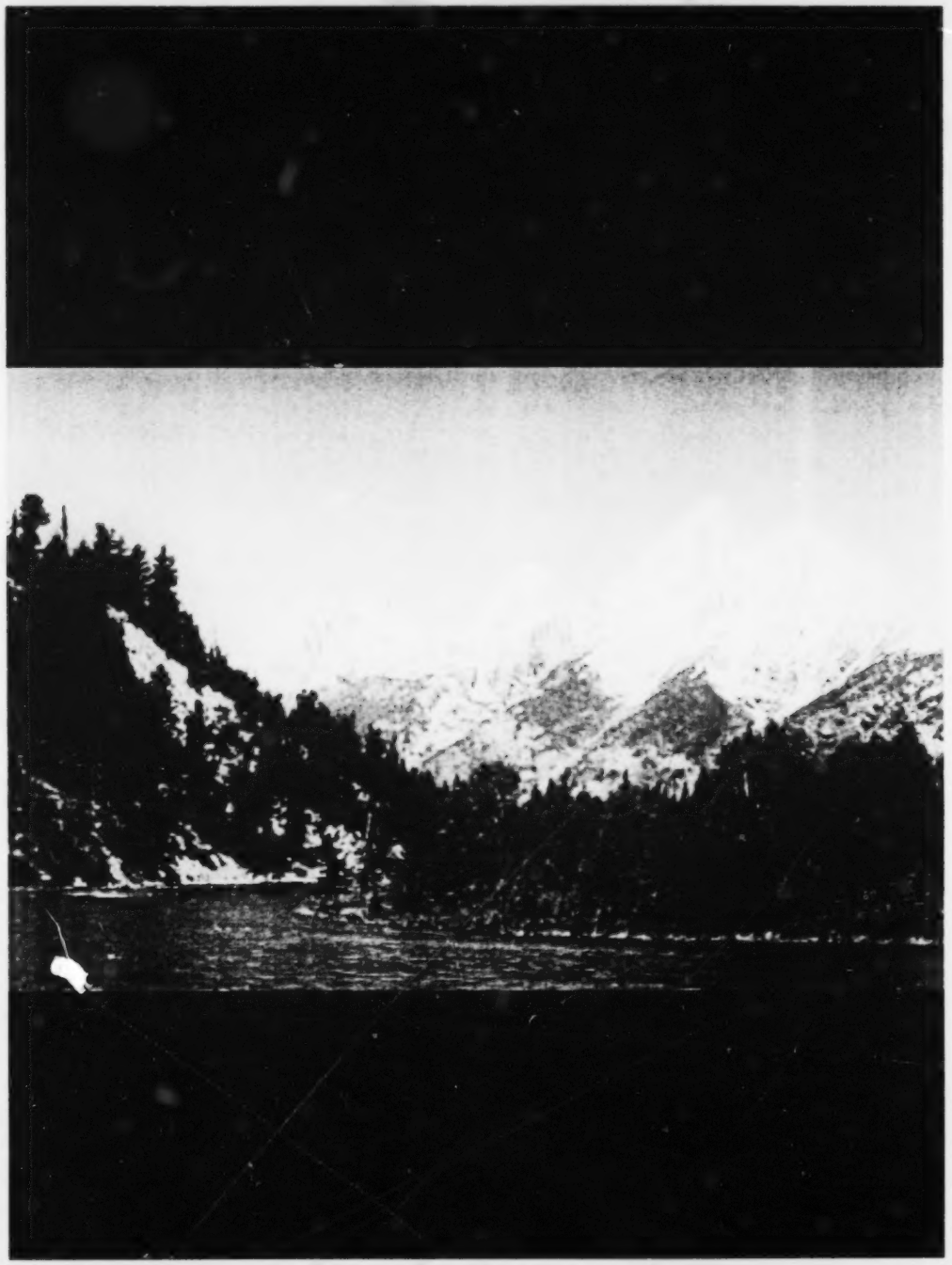
Wyoming is poised to develop highly effective, collaborative relationships and communication networks between national service programs at the state level. The joint needs assessment and database project will link programs across streams with similar training needs, and will connect state training coordinators and program staff with expert trainers. Information about training dates, program needs, and specific trainers will be shared in a systematic way by all three state offices, and potentially by the local programs. The network also has the potential to become a regional resource, linking trainers throughout the intermountain region with state-level offices and program staff. The communication system also promises to link program staff with one another, creating a network of peers who can share their expertise.

The database is the first such technological mechanism that isolated programs and communities can use to effectively link with other programs and resources. It will be maintained primarily by the PDAT coordinator, who will serve programs across all streams. A VISTA coordinator will work in conjunction with the PDAT coordinator to plan training events for national service staff and members. With systems of shared information and communication in place, natural collaborations take on new meaning. The state offices and training coordinators will be able to create more opportunities across streams for staff and members to address common needs and pursue joint projects.

Ultimately, as programs reach out to their own communities and across the state to tap new resources, they will have the opportunity to establish reciprocal relationships with non-national service organizations. The state-level administrators are in an excellent position to facilitate this networking, placing national and community service at the center of a web of volunteer and education resources.

While technology has the potential to facilitate connections across the state and across streams, the three state-level administrators remain at the center of the effort. They recognize that technology has its limits, that the real key to effective partnering among programs and organizations is knowing the needs of each community, recognizing common goals, and working respectfully with individuals, national service staff and members, and communities to achieve those goals.

Wyoming is nicknamed the Equality State because Wyoming women were the first in the nation to vote, hold public office, and serve on juries.



Mount Moran and the Snake River, Grand Teton National Park, near Jackson Hole, Wyoming

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National Service Programs in Wyoming

In Wyoming, national service projects focused on education include one AmeriCorps*State program, six VISTA sponsors with about 30 VISTA members placed in schools and other settings, three Foster Grandparent Programs serving in at least 40 stations, and 47 Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) stations. The four programs profiled here provide a representative view of the different ways in which national service programs work together with other community resources. In many cases, they provide models of effective collaboration with communities on individual events such as literacy fairs or trainings. At the same time, they build the reciprocal relationships that sustain national service initiatives by weaving their services and their staff into the fabric of the community.

Each profile contains three sections: ***Relationships and Resources,*** focusing on how the national service program fits into the local literacy activities and how it participates in the community at large; ***Training Members and Volunteers***, detailing how the program works with other organizations and individuals to train volunteers or members as tutors; and ***Community Partners***, describing the partnering relationships and how they are shaped.

Together, these programs provide effective strategies for identifying, making connections, and partnering with similar resources in any community.

Lake Marie and Snowy
Range Mountains,
west of Laramie,
Wyoming

Project PAL in Laramie

Project PAL (Partners Achieving Literacy), in its second year as an AmeriCorps*State program, operated for its first three years under another name and funding source. Now sponsored by Laramie County Community College, Project PAL has two offices, one on the main campus in Cheyenne, in the southeastern corner of the state, and the other on the Albany County campus in Laramie, 50 miles to the northwest. Each program has its own coordinator and tutoring staff of national service members and volunteers, serving adults, youth, and children in one-on-one literacy tutoring.

The two Project PALs communicate regularly but carry out their work independently in their respective communities. Each manages an America Reads program called New Horizons, which has been readily accepted in the schools, in part because Project PAL is already known as an active, dependable community partner, attentive to learners' needs and always willing to lend a hand to other volunteer or social service efforts. As a new part of an existing program, New Horizons began with an established infrastructure, credibility with the community, and an understanding of how its services fit into the broader picture of literacy needs.

Relationships and Resources

Laramie's Project PAL serves as a model of community collaboration. Its activities and its coordinator are squarely at the center of most literacy efforts in the county. While the University of Wyoming provides AmeriCorps and Federal Work-Study tutors and specialized training, the community is more likely to turn to Project PAL for literacy resources and support.

Under Coordinator Linda Hill's leadership, Project PAL has been instrumental in forming Albany County Reads, a partnership of literacy stakeholders in and around the city of Laramie. Members meet monthly to discuss literacy needs in the community, share new developments or initiatives in their own organizations, plan joint events, and otherwise leverage their resources to better meet the needs of the community. Albany County Reads includes representatives from the county public library, school district, National Education Association, Wyoming Education Associa-

tion, Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), Head Start, University of Wyoming College of Education, Rotary Club, and the local Foster Grandparent Program.

By pooling ideas and energies to create common goals and deliver comprehensive literacy services to all populations in need, Albany County Reads has been effective in involving the entire community in reading and literacy issues. One example is Read Across Wyoming, a statewide celebration of Dr. Seuss's birthday, when volunteers visit classrooms to read to children. Another is the Albany County Literacy Fair, which brings children's authors from around Wyoming and Colorado to read to children and talk about their books. Last year, 10 authors and more than 500 people attended the fair. AmeriCorps members with Project PAL read to children during the fair, and local merchants who hosted the authors' readings donated door prizes.

Participants in Leadership Laramie work with Project PAL and other members of Albany County Reads to learn more about educational issues and literacy activities in the community. Sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Laramie is a one-year program during which participants spend one month on the topic of education by volunteering as Project PAL tutors or assisting with Read Across Wyoming, the literacy fair, or RIF activities, which focus on providing books and other literacy resources to children. This connection was first made by a Leadership Laramie participant who worked with PAL Coordinator Hill at Laramie County Community College.

Project PAL is an effective driving force in Albany County Reads because it operates as an integral part of the community. Its coordinator and staff understand how PAL's services and volunteers meet individual needs and, equally as important, where the project fits into the web of relationships, services, and needs that make up the community of Laramie and surrounding Albany County. Hill reaches out locally to those who have an interest in literacy, with an eye toward how they can benefit each other. When she speaks to the Lions, Kiwanis, and Rotary Clubs, for example, her intent is twofold: to generate interest in the tutoring program and encourage members to become involved, and to publicize the services available to the community through Project PAL and other Albany County Reads organizations. Hill says she receives as many referrals from people who want tutoring services as she does calls from volunteers who want to be tutors.

The Albany County Library is another important literacy partner in the community. One day a week, an AmeriCorps member is available at the library for "drop-in" tutoring with children and adults. This tutor has become an integral part of library services, says Hill, and parents arrange

> Parents feel comfortable dropping their kids off at the library because they know that every Wednesday night the AmeriCorps member will be there to work with them.
>
> Linda Hill, Project PAL Coordinator

visits to the library knowing the tutor will be available. "Parents feel comfortable dropping their kids off because they know that every Wednesday night the AmeriCorps member will be there to work with them."

The library also pairs with Project PAL on a summer family literacy project. AmeriCorps members meet with parents and children at the library during the summer to help them apply for library cards and choose books that families can read together. As part of the project, parents commit to checking out at least one book a week and reading it with their children at least twice. This popular family literacy project, now in its third year, is expected to grow.

Training Members and Volunteers

The tutor training of national service members and community volunteers for Project PAL relies on reciprocal relationships with other organizations and individuals in the community. Developed by Hill, a former teacher in the district, and approved by the district superintendent, the training addresses developmental stages, learning styles, and tutoring techniques. Teachers who request Project PAL tutors have expressed their appreciation for this thorough training because it frees them to spend their time orienting tutors to the classroom and helping the tutors develop relationships with students.

After the initial training, AmeriCorps tutors meet weekly in focus groups to debrief their week's work, share successful strategies, and help each other find solutions to problems. Hill also uses this time to listen for potential difficulties the tutors may be having in their classrooms. She is committed to helping teachers and tutors develop effective and respectful relationships, which in turn provide an optimal setting for tutors to build on their own skills and interests.

The focus groups also provide a forum for ongoing training. Guest speakers from the University of Wyoming College of Education, the county health department, and other organizations are invited to meet with tutors to present information on special topics such as learning disabilities and links between a child's health and learning. This inservice training gives tutors the opportunity to meet other professionals who work in literacy or related areas.

Peace Corps recruits from the area who will be teaching abroad are also integrated into Project PAL training sessions. Hill worked with the regional Peace Corps representative to make this

connection in order to give incoming Peace Corps members some experience in teaching issues before they are sent to their overseas placement.

One AmeriCorps member has become a particularly valuable resource to the school system in Laramie. With AmeriCorps training dollars, the member was trained and certified to screen children for scoptopic sensitivity, also known as Irlene Syndrome. This vision disability impairs the ability of the eyes to focus, and thus to read. In children, it is often mistaken for dyslexia. The AmeriCorps member is available to any school in the district that requests testing for individuals or groups of children.

The unique characteristics of Laramie are in part responsible for the success of the community's collaborative efforts around literacy, most notably by the Albany County Reads consortium. With a population of approximately 27,000, Laramie has the feel of a small town, but the university and community college offer an unusual richness of resources and expertise. Project PAL counts faculty, students, academic courses, and organizations affiliated with the university among its broad array of resources. Also, networking in a small town makes identifying partners and stakeholders a simple task. For example, when Albany County Reads was forming and sought representatives from local government, schools, and others involved in literacy, one person fit the bill. Dave Williams is Laramie's mayor, the principal of two elementary schools, and the Reading Is Fundamental coordinator for the school district.

The first people to live in the Wyoming area were Indian hunters at least 11,000 years ago.

Community Partners: Project PAL

This wealth of resources and effective local networking, mixed with a widespread spirit of community involvement, has been Project PAL's recipe for success.

Albany County Public Library. The public library has been an active partner with Project PAL, providing space for AmeriCorps tutors and students, and hosting the family literacy summer program.

Albany County Reads. This group of organizations and individuals interested in literacy issues meets monthly to talk about current and future projects, share information, and plan joint projects.

- Albany County Head Start
- Albany County Public Library
- Albany County School District
- Community members, some who first worked with Project PAL and RIF through their membership in Leadership Laramie, a program sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce
- Foster Grandparent Program
- National Education Association
- Project PAL
- Reading Is Fundamental (RIF); the coordinator is also an elementary school principal and Laramie's mayor
- Rotary Club
- University of Wyoming College of Education
- Wyoming Education Association

County Agencies. The Public Health Office in particular has worked with Project PAL to provide tutors with information about mental health and other health issues that may concern tutors or the students they serve. Representatives from county agencies provide support and partner with Project PAL by participating in the tutors' weekly focus group discussions.

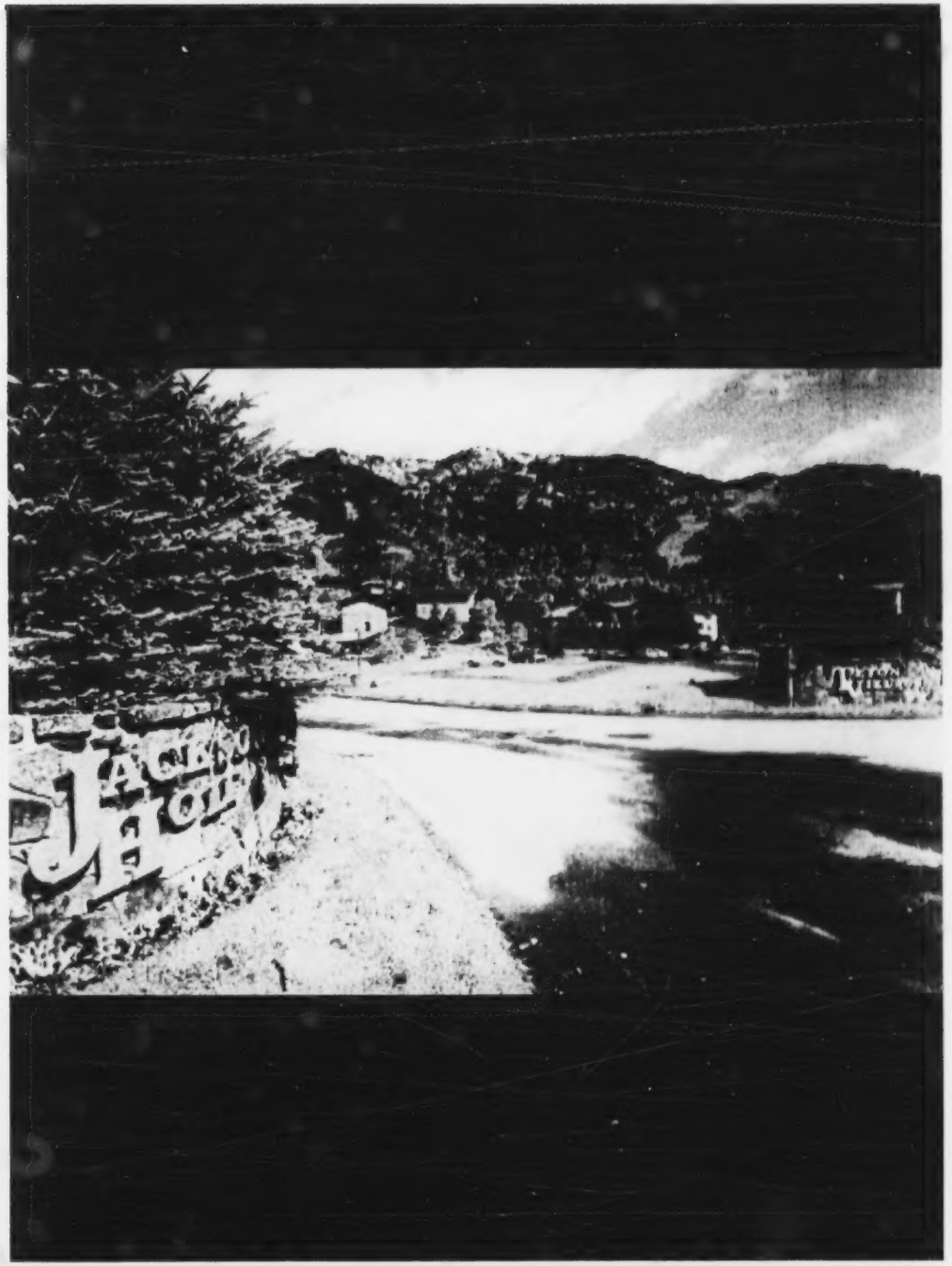
Foster Grandparent Program. The coordinator of Wyoming's first new FGP program in 10 years is working closely with the Project PAL coordinator to create training for FGP volunteers who will serve in five counties. The Project PAL coordinator will present a training on learning styles to FGP volunteers and Head Start parents, a partnership initiated with the help of the Corporation's Wyoming State Office and director. An offshoot of this collaboration is a training committee, through which national service and other volunteer projects will share information about upcoming training events and possibly plan joint trainings.

Leadership Laramie. This project of the Laramie Area Chamber of Commerce involves new and current residents in PAL as a way to help them learn more about education and literacy issues in the community. Leadership Laramie participants volunteer as tutors and help staff special events.

Local Businesses. Partnerships with local businesses have taken several forms. Local bookstores participate in the annual literacy fair, donating door prizes and give-aways and helping to bring in regional children's authors. Project PAL has received support from both locally owned businesses and national chains such as K-Mart, Wal-Mart, and Hastings, a book and music store. The key to these partnerships, according to PAL Coordinator Linda Hill, "is not to ask for anything specific. Asking for general support or help is the best way to get them involved. They'll give anything from money to books and bookmarks, even food."

Peace Corps. Project PAL provides orientation and training for area Peace Corps recruits, or invitees, who may be teaching abroad. Recruits become Project PAL tutors, attending the literacy training and participating in weekly focus groups and ongoing training. This relationship was formed when the area Peace Corps recruiter in Denver, Colorado, connected with Project PAL to help prepare invitees for their overseas experience.

University of Wyoming. With its wealth of resources in faculty, students, and organizations, the University of Wyoming serves as a model of reciprocity. Project PAL draws on faculty for information and resources, and on students to serve as tutors. Faculty from the Math Department and College of Education have been key contacts for Project PAL as it builds its resources and capacity to help all students. These contacts have been made chiefly through informal networking (identifying education classes focused on reading or tutoring, for example), or staying attuned to current and future events on campus.



Jackson Hole,
Wyoming

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Teton Literacy Project in Jackson Hole

Like Project PAL in Laramie, the Teton Literacy Project (TLP) in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, was originally an adult basic education tutoring program. Prior to receiving America Reads funding last year, TLP tutored children and youth only when they were referred by parents or teachers. The America Reads component of TLP, called Students and Teachers Achieving Reading Success (STARS), is coordinated by a locally recruited VISTA member who works closely with teachers to pair volunteer tutors with K-3 students who need extra, one-on-one reading time.

Relationships and Resources

From the outset, TLP worked closely with the Teton County School District to design STARS. Although America Reads presented the project with the opportunity to offer its services to more children in the community, TLP had never worked in the schools and was initially hesitant to place tutors in classrooms. Project Director Milissa Tivnan says that TLP initially conceived of delivering the new tutoring services in the same way adult tutoring was offered, either in the TLP office or in a location chosen by the tutor and student. But in an effort to create an effective program, Tivnan and the other grant writers met with the district superintendent and elementary school principal. When the school representatives articulated the teachers' needs, chief among them was the need for tutors in the classroom, working one-to-one with students. "A project will never work if one entity wants to be in control," says Tivnan. "You have to be willing to listen to other people's ideas and see how they'll benefit your own vision."

The initial consultation about the grant helped shape STARS, and reshape TLP. It was the beginning of a strong, mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and the school. STARS volunteers tutor students in their classrooms, in after-school settings, and will even meet at a child's own home given special circumstances. In addition, STARS collaborates with two other child-focused projects in the community: the Latch-Key program, providing daycare and after-school care for children, and GAP! (Girls Actively Participating), an organization that works to build girls' self-esteem and confidence through outdoor activities and other community-based projects. The GAP! coordinator, herself a former VISTA member, teamed with Latch-Key

Wyoming ranks ninth in size among the states and fourth among the Rocky Mountain States.

and STARS to create a cross-age tutoring program that pairs GAP! youth with Latch-Key children in a reading tutoring relationship. Activities take place in space provided by the school district.

TLP has initiated another cross-age tutoring program in which members from the high school Key Club meet one-to-one with middle school students learning English, paying particular attention to academic language. The younger learners benefit from individual attention in reading and form a positive relationship with an older youth.

Collaborative efforts with other organizations generally occur around discrete events such as literacy fairs, book drives, or library field trips. However, TLP is part of a coalition of service-oriented nonprofits in Jackson Hole that can call on each other for a broad range of assistance and cooperation. The nonprofits are linked by a common funding source, the Community Foundation of Jackson Hole (CFJH). At quarterly breakfast meetings, all CFJH grantees talk about the latest developments in their projects.

Although these are informative sessions, according to Tivnan, TLP's most powerful relationships evolve from conversations held outside of the formal networking. For example, TLP teamed with *Compañeras*, a project of the Public Health Office, to pair Spanish-speaking tutors from TLP with Spanish-speaking women, many of them expectant mothers, who want to learn essential English skills. Much of the tutoring time focuses on prenatal health information. TLP also helped create the literacy content for "Best Start for Babies," the program's packet of prenatal and newborn information. TLP staff wrote materials explaining the importance of reading to young children and provided several books for parents to share with their children. These tutoring relationships have become crucial social connections for women who are new to the area and to the United States, lasting long after the women's connection with *Compañeras* ends.

In another example of collaboration, the Teton County Library contacted TLP when it wanted to increase its Spanish-language holdings. Because of the quarterly networking breakfasts and TLP's high profile in the community, library personnel knew that of all the organizations in the community, TLP had the most direct contact with the Spanish-speaking population. TLP tutors and staff offered their suggestions and queried others in the Spanish-speaking community. The result was a collection of titles that will enrich the library's holdings for all members of the Jackson area community.

Jackson Hole is a small, geographically isolated town in the northwest corner of Wyoming. Its economy is largely based on tourism and associated service industries. The population is a com-

bination of wealthy residents who live in the town of Jackson Hole, and those who work in service-oriented businesses and often live in more affordable, nearby towns. According to CFJH Executive Director Clare Payne-Simmons, wealthy residents move to Jackson Hole and expect the same level of services and cultural programs they enjoyed elsewhere, while many of the service workers want basic assistance in areas of health care, education, and child care. These demographics have produced a unique situation in Jackson Hole: a population of around 5,000 is served by approximately 150 nonprofits in arts, education, the environment, and recreation. The size of the community creates a sense of camaraderie among the service organizations and agencies, says Payne-Simmons. Programs such as TLP know precisely where to turn when they need assistance with special projects or new initiatives; in turn, organizations and individuals call on TLP to lend its resources and expertise on literacy and reading.

A good example of sustainable VISTA service can also be found in Jackson Hole. TLP Coordinator Tivnan and GAP! Coordinator Amy Manhart are both former VISTA members who remained in the nonprofit community. Like all VISTA members in Jackson Hole, they were locally recruited and thus have an understanding of the community and its needs and a commitment to help meet those needs. After their term of service, VISTA members are easily incorporated as valuable players in local, nonprofit projects.

Training Members and Volunteers

Teton Literacy Project tutors participate in a six-hour training held over two days. Based on Literacy Volunteers of America material, the training covers a broad base of information on literacy and how children learn to read, with a fine-tune focus on specific materials and strategies to work with particular students, such as English-language learners, children, or adults.

TLP has had difficulty offering follow-up trainings on specialized topics such as learning styles because of the logistics of gathering all the volunteers at one time. It has addressed this challenge by creating a resource library and providing one-to-one connections between tutors and staff. The coordinator, VISTA members, or other TLP staff members are always available to tutors who need assistance with resources, tutoring strategies, or consultation around other issues.

A project will never work if one entity wants to be in control. You have to be willing to listen to other people's ideas and see how they'll benefit your own.
—Milissa Tivnan, TLP Coordinator

Community Partners: Teton Literacy Project

Community Foundation of Jackson Hole. This local grant-making foundation funds many of the nonprofit organizations, including the Teton Literacy Project, serving the residents of Jackson Hole and surrounding communities. The foundation also acts as a clearinghouse of information and referrals for both individuals and organizations in the community. The foundation is leading a statewide initiative to create youth-centered programming around diversity and ethics. In conjunction with the Teton County School District, Wyoming Humanities Council, and the Southern Poverty Law Center, CFJH will work with schools to create and pilot a curriculum that teaches all-age school children the principles and practices of valuing diversity and ethical decisionmaking in relation to racism, discrimination, and hate crimes. The program will be piloted in Jackson Hole schools and later made available to schools throughout the state.

GAP! (Girls Actively Participating). GAP! involves adolescent girls in outdoor recreation and other community-based activities to improve their self-esteem and confidence. GAP! works in conjunction with TLP to provide cross-age tutoring to elementary and middle school students in the after-school program, Latch-Key.

Latch-Key. The Latch-Key program provides recreation and daycare facilities to meet both community and parents' needs. Latch-Key students work with TLP tutors and with GAP! participants in an after-school tutoring setting.

Local Businesses. Key connections with the local newspaper, radio, and television stations have been an asset to the Teton Literacy Project. As a public service, the media have matched TLP's advertisements or waived production costs for public service announcements and commercials.

Teton County Library. The county public library worked with TLP to improve the library's holdings of Spanish-language publications to help meet the literacy needs of the area's growing population of immigrants, many from Mexico and Guatemala. The library works with TLP tutors to orient students of all ages to the library; during the summer months, children involved in TLP programs go on a field trip to the library to learn about how to find books on topics that interest them.

Teton County Public Health Office. TLP worked with the Public Health Office to create a literacy information and care package for new mothers. Additionally, Spanish-speaking TLP tutors are paired with expectant mothers and other women who are new to the United States and the Jackson Hole community. The tutors help the women gain basic English skills, especially around the topic of prenatal care, and provide a social support system to the new immigrants.

Eagle Creek, Washakie Wilderness, near the Wind River Reservation

America Reads on the Wind River Reservation

The Wind River Reservation, comprised of the lands held jointly by the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho nations, encompasses approximately 3,000 square miles in central Wyoming. The reservation is home to about 22,000 people, representing half of the state's native population. Five public school districts and a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) school serve the reservation. Four of the public schools and the BIA school, St. Stephens Indian School, host eight VISTA members who focus on America Reads literacy projects.

Relationships and Resources

Schools are the hub of community activity and volunteer involvement on the Wind River Reservation. They provide a central meeting place for the scattered population and serve as a focal point for tribal activities related to native history, language, and practice. Because the reservation communities are small and isolated, the resources available to education-focused programs take a different form than those of other Wyoming communities. Unlike Jackson Hole, towns like Arapaho and Ethete do not have a wealth of nonprofits to draw on, nor is there sufficient population to support volunteer and training networks such as those developed around Laramie. Instead, tutoring programs coordinated by VISTA members depend on parents and school staff as their most valuable resources. Schools and national service members work to shape their programs so that parents are closely involved and existing programs with tribal elders are integrated. What grew out of necessity has blossomed into a model of community collaboration, framed by family involvement and cultural programming.

Community Resource Nights, held monthly at several schools across the reservation, draw students, parents, and other community members into the schools. Library and computer facilities are made available to tribal members, and teachers often use this time for presentations on school projects and educational initiatives. At St. Stephens Indian School, teachers and the America Reads VISTA member used one Community Resource Night to tell parents about the America Reads program and to teach parents reading strategies they could practice at home with their children. The VISTA member showed teaching videos produced by Bank Street College for the LEARNS project, which he had received in his Early Service Training.

The huge herds of buffalo that roamed the prairies of Wyoming attracted the Arapaho, Bannock, Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Crow, Shoshone, Sioux, and Ute Indians to the area.

Because reservation schools and other tribal organizations participate in many community development programs, they have a strong impetus to connect and integrate their various projects. Those involved with Goals 2000, for example, a federal program that supports states and school districts to develop academic standards and implement school reform, have created strong links between their work in school reform and technology, the school districts, and the communities.

In Arapaho, a small Wind River community, America Reads complements the Even Start and HOSTS (Helping One Student to Succeed) programs already in the elementary school. HOSTS pairs a school child with a community member who serves as the child's reading mentor. The cultural program created by the school district helps frame the children's learning and connects their literacy development directly to their Arapaho ethnic identity and cultural experience. For the VISTA members, existing resources, tutoring structure, and relationships with children in the school have helped weave America Reads into the school.

About 80 percent of Wyoming land is used for grazing.

St. Stephens Indian School, in the community of St. Stephens, has combined Reading Recovery and cultural programming to place culturally significant content at the core of learning. Parents, teachers, and community members unite to share and preserve their history with the children. Tribal elders teach children traditional language, history, and crafts. Middle school students engage in service-learning projects that require them to do research on their cultural heritage and the tribal nation's history. Students are more motivated to learn, says VISTA member Ken Hansen, and look forward to reading instruction and tutoring sessions because they have a direct connection to the material being taught.

The VISTA members working on America Reads projects on the Wind River Reservation are largely recruited locally, and thus they have a clear understanding of the communities they serve and the obstacles that must be overcome to deliver tutoring services to children and create outreach to parents. Having a consistent group of volunteer tutors and parents in the schools, for example, has often proved impractical. Many people do not have access to reliable transportation, and inclement weather often makes winter travel impossible. In an adaptive response, a teacher and several VISTA members used the school van during the summer months to take materials directly to students and their families. Home visits are particularly valuable during the summer because they provide consistent contact, reading practice, and resources while children are out of school. This summer, VISTA members and teachers will again go on the road with the school's "reading van."

Training Members and Volunteers

America Reads activities on the Wind River Reservation are coordinated by VISTA members placed in schools. After-school programs at the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho, hosted by VISTA members, often feature small group reading and tutoring for children. Much of the members' Early Service Training on tutoring and literacy techniques has been passed on to volunteer tutors who have, in turn, adapted the techniques to augment existing programs in Wind River Schools. VISTA members also share resources from national service trainings and technical assistance providers, including LEARNS, with parents, teachers, and tutors.

Reading Recovery instructors at St. Stephens Indian School have provided ongoing instruction and support to the VISTA member who coordinates the America Reads program there. The VISTA member passes these techniques and materials on to the volunteer tutors. The Reading Recovery approach creates a distinct culture within a school, and at St. Stephens the VISTA member and the tutors, primarily parents, are incorporated into that culture and fully supported. Coupled with the schools' academic integration of tribal heritage, America Reads has become an integral part of a rich environment of student motivation and parental interest.

Community Partners: Wind River Reservation

Boys and Girls Club and Green Thumb, Inc. The Boys and Girls Club of the Northern Arapaho employs a Green Thumb worker who provides one-to-one attention to children and youth during the homework-help time. Green Thumb, Inc., is a job-training program that places people in employment situations that will help them gain new skills.

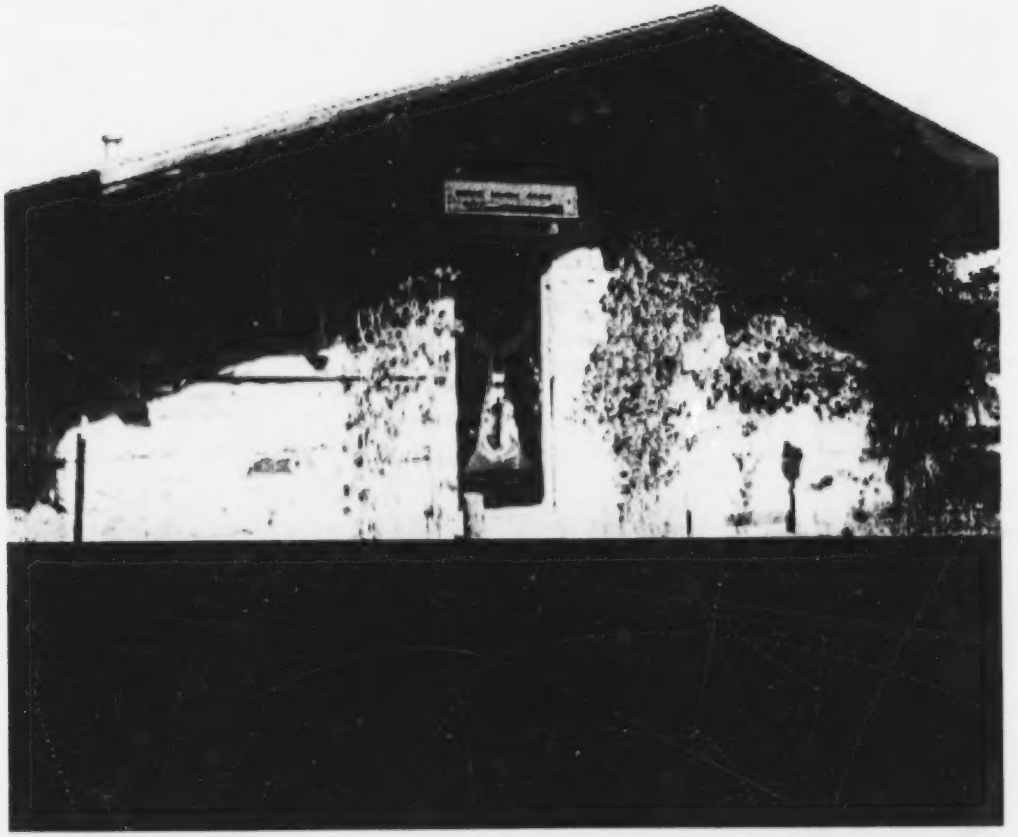
Goals 2000. Goals 2000 work teams, divided by school districts, recognize and build on the importance of schools as the center of the community on the Wind River Reservation. Existing partnerships with businesses and educational institutions could be of use to national service programs.

HOSTS. Helping One Student to Succeed encompasses much of the literacy activities in the public schools. The program works to increase community and parent involvement in schools, with a particular focus on reading.

Parents. Parents are the key players in national service projects focused on education on the Wind River Reservation.

Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery instructors have incorporated America Reads projects into schoolwide efforts to improve students' reading abilities. Their training and assistance in acculturation have helped provide stability and acceptance for the VISTA-run tutoring project within the school.

Tribal Elders. The cultural programming in many schools on the reservation has helped to create and maintain students' motivation in all their school work. Cultural and language instruction by tribal elders serves as a model of collaboration in any community.



North American Indian Heritage Museum, near St. Stephens, Wyoming

Fort Caspar,
Casper, Wyoming

America Reads in Natrona County

Natrona County is one of the two most populous counties in the state, with the majority of its residents clustered in Casper, a city of about 50,000. Seven VISTA members coordinate America Reads programs in approximately 15 schools in the Natrona County School District. Tutoring programs range from new initiatives that are only loosely related to classroom work to programs that are fully integrated into an existing framework created by programs such as Success for All or Reading Recovery.

Relationships and Resources

The concentration of a relatively large number of VISTA members in Natrona County schools has made collaboration natural and easy. VISTA members meet about once a week to talk about project developments, coordinate joint events, and brainstorm ways to address challenges such as how to recruit volunteers. Last year, they planned a communitywide literacy fair and recruited local "celebrities," including the mayor of Casper and the police chief, to read to children and talk about the importance of reading. A local shopping mall donated space for the event.

Natrona County presents an excellent example of effective collaboration by national service staff within a stream of service. The seven VISTA members have created a strong support system, relying on each other for stimulating intellectual exchanges as well as project assistance. Indeed, they seem to have reached a point of critical mass and are now ready to connect with other VISTA members and national service programs outside of Natrona County.

Training Members and Volunteers

Much of the content and tutoring strategies used by the VISTA members is drawn from their own Early Service Training focused on literacy. For schools with highly structured reading programs such as Success for All, VISTA members work more closely with teachers and each other to devise training techniques and literacy tools that complement the classroom approach to reading. Jennifer Thompson, a VISTA member with a graduate degree in education who plans to pursue her Ph.D. in the field, has been a particularly valuable resource to the others.

By the 1840s, pioneers were streaming west through Wyoming on three famous trails: the California Trail, the Mormon Trail to Utah, and the Oregon Trail to the Pacific Northwest.

Community Partners: Natrona County

Local Business and Government. Businesses and government officials, particularly in Casper, have supported America Reads work by participating in special events organized by VISTA members. The local shopping mall hosted a literacy fair, and government officials and others volunteered their time to read to children attending the event.

Other VISTA Members. The VISTA members placed in Natrona County have been valuable partners to each other. They meet periodically, plan joint events, and provide significant support to each other. Their close connections have helped them build a professional community, which they would like to expand to include national service members throughout the state.

Parents and Volunteers. Parents and other volunteers have been the main partners in the reading tutoring programs coordinated by VISTA members. According to one VISTA member, the programs she coordinates that are the most likely to be sustained after her term of service are the ones that have strong parent involvement. In one of those schools, a parent who is a general school volunteer has been instrumental in orienting VISTA members to the school and staff, and in garnering support from other parents.

Non-National Service Programs in Wyoming

The following non-national service organizations provide statewide support to educators and other professionals involved in literacy and education. These organizations frequently communicate and sometimes work with each other, and less often with national service staff and programs. The Wyoming Center for the Book maintains a database of literacy professionals in the state, including authors, but there is no system that connects all organizations, including national service programs, in a manner that facilitates consistent communication or collaboration.

Organizations Serving Children with Disabilities. Several organizations focusing on disabilities and early intervention are active in Wyoming: Easter Seals, United Way, Wyoming Institute for Disabilities, Family Support Networks (county based), and Project UPLIFT, a support, education, advocacy, and referral source for parents of children with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders.

University of Wyoming, Cooperative Extension Services. County offices of the university's Extension Services provide a wide array of services and programs to rural communities. Extension Services is probably best known for its coordination of county-based 4-H programs. In Wyoming, the Community Connections for Competent Youth initiative seeks to improve the quality and quantity of services to at-risk youth and their families and to build their capacity for success. The Dreamcatcher project provides resources to families and the agencies that serve families.

Extension Services is committed to collaborating with organizations and agencies that have a similar focus. The time is ripe for partnering with national service programs and leveraging resources.

Wyoming Center for the Book. The Wyoming Center for the Book, a project of the Wyoming State Library, is affiliated with the Library of Congress Center for the Book. The organization is committed to promoting literacy and a love of books through events and projects. One such project is Mother Goose Asks "Why?", which targets parents of children ages three to seven who are not likely to be involved with community organizations, including libraries or schools.

Developed by the Vermont Center for the Book and expanded by the National Science Foundation, Mother Goose Asks "Why?" gives parents materials, practice, and support in helping their young children with reading and science activities. In Wyoming, five pilot sites have been select-

In 1924, Wyoming voters elected the first woman governor, Nellie Taylor Ross.

ed, including one on the Wind River Reservation that will recruit parents of Head Start children, and another in the southeastern area of the state that will recruit parents of seasonal and migrant agricultural workers. Trainers who were trained at the Vermont center will share what they have learned with Wyoming parents.

When Mother Goose Asks "Why?" first began, Linn Rounds, Executive Director for the Wyoming Center for the Book, sought to have the State Commission for National and Community Service coordinate the project. Although this was not possible, connections with national service projects have continued. Several national service programs will become pilot sites this year, and staff will receive the materials and training to implement this family literacy project in their areas.

The Wyoming Center for the Book is perhaps be t poised to network with organizations and individuals supporting literacy in the state. There are some links between Center personnel and projects and the Wyoming Council for the Humanities, Wyoming Council for the Arts, Wyoming Alliance for Literacy, and Wyoming Office of Lifelong Learning. The Wyoming Center for the Book could become a valuable source of information and activity for national service programs and staff looking beyond their communities for support and resources.

Wyoming became the 44th state on July 10, 1890.

Wyoming Literacy Resource Center. The Wyoming Literacy Resource Center (WLRC) is a federally funded project that provides training and resources to adult education programs throughout the state. WLRC is housed in the Office of Lifelong Learning and Instruction at the University of Wyoming in Laramie.

Wyoming Office of Lifelong Learning/Wyoming Alliance for Literacy. These two literacy organizations link professionals and others in the state interested in adult literacy. Their similar missions and service arenas led them to merge earlier this year. Strong links and partnerships exist between these organizations and community colleges, where adult basic education and general equivalency diploma (GED) instruction are most prevalent.

Wyoming Reading Council. The Wyoming Reading Council (WRC) is the state affiliate of the International Reading Association. At the state level, this organization links professionals and others interested in literacy and lifelong learning. The organization sponsors an annual conference, a young authors' contest, children's book awards, and scholarships. For national service programs, WRC could provide important links to teachers and other professionals working in literacy.

National Elk Refuge,
near Jackson Hole,
Wyoming

Local Literacy Resources

The organizations listed below were identified during this case study as local literacy resources that partner with national service programs or could be valuable partners with education-focused national service programs.

School-based

- After-school programs
- District personnel, including superintendent
- Head Start staff and programs
- Helping One Student to Succ . .(HOSTS) coordinator
- Key Club members
- National Education Association
- Parent/Teacher Associations
- Reading Is Fundamental coordinator
- School staff, including instructors in special programming such as Reading Recovery and Success for All
- School volunteer coordinator
- Wyoming Education Association

Community-based

- American Mothers, Inc.
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Civic Organizations
  - Kiwanis Club
  - Lions Club
  - Rotary Club
- Community foundations
  - Casper Area Community Foundation
  - Community Foundation of Jackson Hole
  - Sheridan Area Community Foundation
  - Wyoming Community Foundation
- County public libraries
- Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth (a Search Institute initiative)
- Literacy Volunteers of America, local affiliates
- Parents
- Peace Corps

Community-based, cont'd.

- Services to children with disabilities, with interest in education and literacy
  - Easter Seals
  - Family Support Networks
  - Project UPLIFT
  - United Way
  - Wyoming Institute on Disabilities
- Tribal elders
- Wyoming Office of Lifelong Learning/ Wyoming Alliance for Literacy
- Wyoming Reading Council
- YMCA/YWCA
- Youth! Wyoming's Promise (state initiative of America's Promise)

Government-based

- State
  - Wyoming Arts Council
  - Wyoming Center for the Book
  - Wyoming Council for the Humanities
  - Wyoming Department of Education
- Local
  - Elected officials
  - Health Department and Public Health Office
  - Public safety officials

Higher Education

- Community colleges
  - Casper College
  - Central Wyoming College
  - Eastern Wyoming College
  - Laramie County Community College
  - Northwest College
  - Sheridan College/Gillette Campus
  - Western Wyoming College

Higher Education, cont'd.

- University of Wyoming
  - College of Education
  - Cooperative Extension Services
    - —4-H Programs
    - —Community Connections for Competent Youth
    - —Dreamcatcher
  - Math Department
  - Wyoming Literacy Resource Center

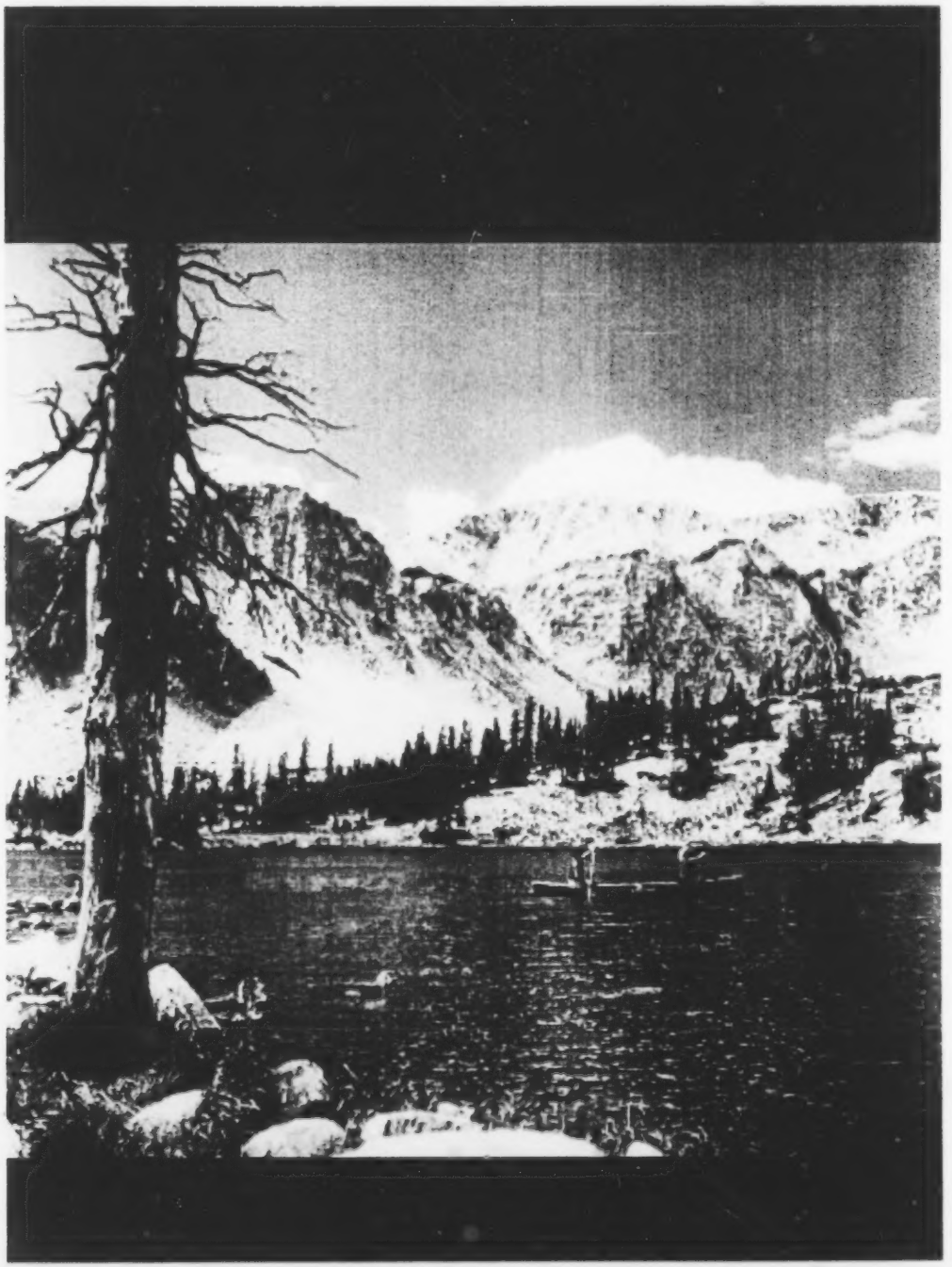
Business

- Chamber of Commerce
  - Leadership Laramie
- Green Thumb, Inc.
- Local bookstores and other merchants, including shopping malls
- Media
  - Newspaper
  - Radio
  - Television
- National chain stores

National Service Resources

- Corporation for National Service State Office
- Learn and Serve America Office, Wyoming Department of Education
- National training and technical assistance providers
- Other national service staff and members
- Wyoming Commission on National and Community Service (Serve Wyoming)

Brooklyn Lake and
Snowy Range
Mountains, west of
Laramie, Wyoming



Snowy Range
Mountains, west of
Laramie, Wyoming

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Conclusion

National service programs focused on education in Wyoming are shaped by the communities they serve. However, there are several common characteristics that create a general picture of national service programs across the state.

National service staff and programs turn inward to their communities for support. Staff and programs work most closely with organizations and individuals within their own communities. Distance between communities and difficulties associated with communication and travel contribute to this trend. Reciprocity is a key principle for any successful, long-term collaboration within a community. Identifying shared goals allows partners to make needed contributions while meeting their own organizational needs.

Local "natural" collaborations are the bedrock of successful partnerships in a large, rural state. Collaboration and partnerships between organizations that are in close proximity, serve the same clients, and have similar organizational goals have been the most successful in Wyoming. This is true for those making connections within a stream of service, with programs from other streams of service, and with organizations not directly involved with national service.

Collaboration occurs most often around discrete events such as book drives or literacy fairs. Although some programs have established lasting partnerships around joint projects, these collaborations have not significantly affected the way either organization does business. Only in one case has a program's relationship with community partners changed the way the program operates within the community. In all cases, cooperation, partnership, and collaboration have occurred with organizations focused on literacy projects.

Education-focused national service programs are often the only literacy resource in their communities. Program staff are more likely to offer support or resources to others in their community than to request support. Although this is particularly true for adult basic education resources, it applies to programs that serve younger learners as well. Many schools do not have reading specialists, and America Reads tutors bring a focus on literacy issues and a tutoring structure to the schools.

Programs that successfully partner with other organizations are part of communitywide networks of literacy professionals and service organizations. Programs that have formed partnerships to deliver services or pursue joint projects have done so with organizations they know through formal networks, such as a common funding source or service focus. Some national service programs have a strong communitywide presence and partner with non-national service organizations. This most often occurs when the national service program has defined its role as a resource to the entire community and understands how it fits into the network of existing services.

America Reads programs that are well received by schools and have significant support and participation from educators, parents, and others are established within existing literacy organizations. America Reads program coordinators who were most positive in their outlook on sustainability, whose volunteer training was well established, and who regularly partnered with other community organizations have effectively incorporated America Reads services into existing programs. These programs, generally focused on older youth and adults, have an established administrative structure, a broad view of literacy needs and resources in the community, and a proven credibility with community members, organizations, and schools.

VISTA-run America Reads programs that are likely to be sustained have become an integral part of school activities, and the VISTA members have been incorporated into the school culture. America Reads VISTA members who expressed confidence that the tutoring programs they helped create would continue operating after their terms of service were also those who felt their programs had become part of the school culture. This acceptance has happened in schools with a formal structure that frames literacy efforts, such as Reading Recovery or schoolwide reform, and in schools where both principals and teachers have used America Reads as the means to organize reading tutoring and to build parent involvement. Interestingly, many of these VISTA members are recruited from the very communities in which they now serve.

Recommendations

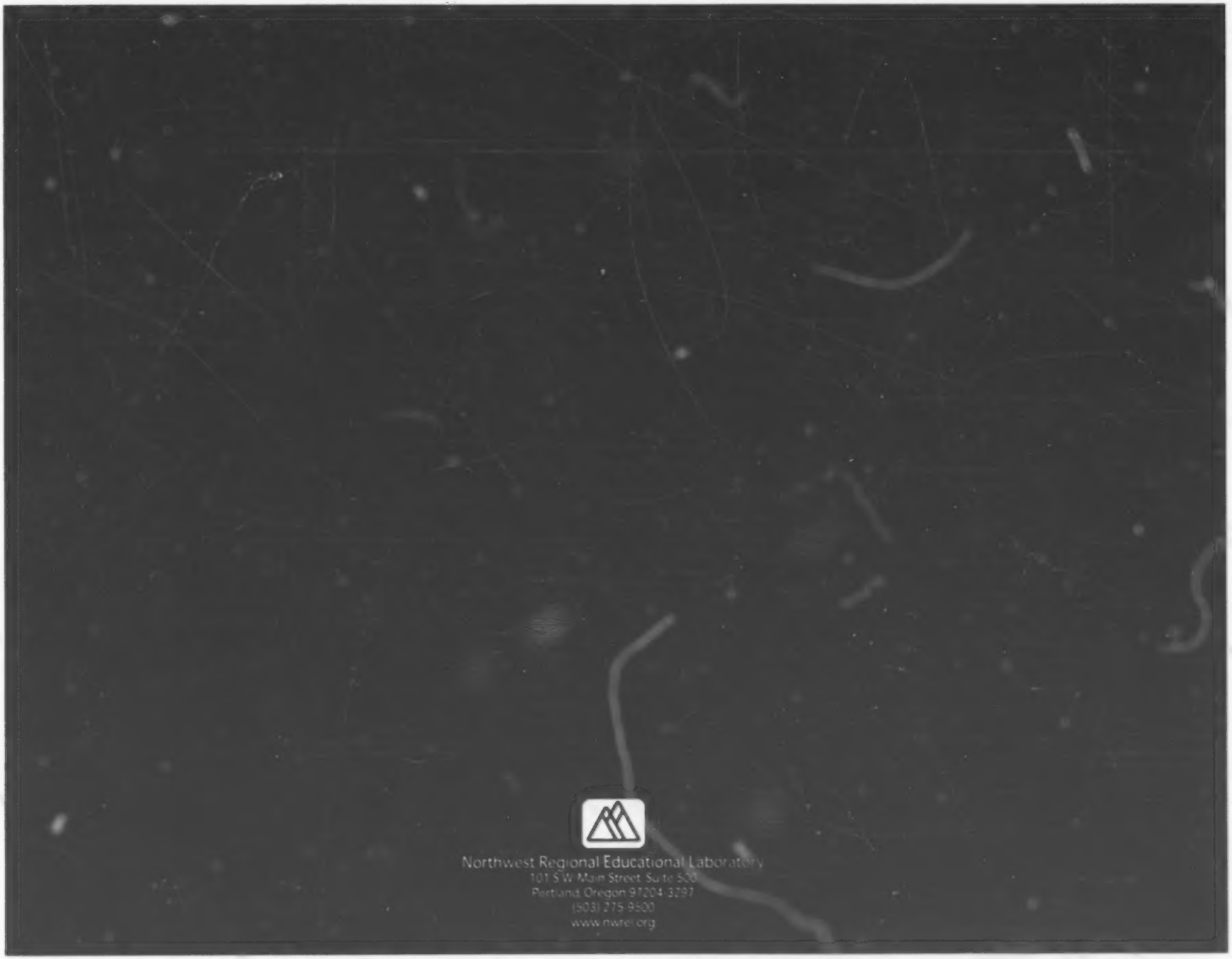
The following recommendations are based on the Wyoming case study, as well as on experience gained by the LEARNS team in working with national service programs and administrators throughout the country. From this knowledge, states may encourage collaboration and help programs draw on local resources by:

- Capitalizing on opportunities for staff and member collaboration, such as statewide conferences
- Identifying literacy and education resources available statewide and sharing that information with program staff
- Sharing information and forming partnerships with non-national service organizations focused on literacy and education
- Creating a means for national service staff to regularly communicate across communities and streams

Program coordinators, including VISTA members, may become strong community partners by:

- Seeking to understand how their programs' services fit into the community's existing array of literacy resources and services
- Working to incorporate services into a program with an established infrastructure and credibility
- Making connections with school personnel and parents to help create a stake in the project's work
- Identifying "natural" partners and working to create common ground with other organizations so that more opportunities for collaboration are created
- Reaching out to organizations, government agencies, educators, and individuals who have an interest in literacy, and creating opportunities for regular communication and cooperation

notes



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